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Background

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Department of Health and Human Services

Revised February 1998

1999 National Food Safety Initiative

On January 25, 1997, the President announced the National Food Safety Initiative. The initiative includes components for reducing the incidence of foodborne illness from farm-to-table. Key components include expansion of the Federal food safety surveillance system, improved coordination between Federal, State, and local health authorities, improved risk assessment capabilities, increased inspection, expanded research, consumer education, and strategic planning. Utilizing the funds provided by Congress in 1998, an increase of \$43 million, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have initiated changes to ensure the safety of a wider variety range of food products from a broader range of hazards. In addition, USDA and HHS have identified measures that need to be taken to ensure the safety of fresh fruits and vegetables consistent with the President's directive on this issue. USDA, HHS, and other interested parties will seek input on measures that can be taken to improve food safety during production, transportation, storage, distribution, and in the home.

1999 Budget Request

For 1999, the Administration is proposing an increase of \$101 million for the National Food Safety Initiative. Of this amount, \$46 million is allocated to USDA and \$55 million to HHS. The 1999 National Food Safety Initiative builds on the successes of the 1998 initiative as well as fills the gaps that have been identified in the past year. In 1999, the focus of the initiative is on enhancing the safety of imported and domestic fruits and vegetables, targeting food safety education, implementing of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems in appropriate sectors of the food supply, and developing of scientific information and tools to control a greater range of food safety hazards. Funding is requested for the following activities:

Enhance surveillance and investigation to improve outbreak response
(+\$7 million):

101 million

HHS (+\$6.7 million): The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will work with States to identify potential food safety threats early. CDC and FDA will further build the capabilities and coverage of the FoodNet early-

warning surveillance system and will improve monitoring of threats to food by expanding the range of pathogens under surveillance. The agencies also will improve information sharing among agencies and with the public, and provide training and technical assistance to State/local agencies for outbreak investigation.

USDA (+\$0.3 million): The Economic Research Service (ERS) will evaluate the effectiveness of food safety measures by analyzing foodborne illness surveillance data. New estimates will be developed for the national incidence of foodborne disease, distribution of illness among subpopulations, and rates of illness.

Strengthen coordination and improve efficiency (+\$0.2 million):

HHS will work with other Federal agencies and States to expand assistance to states and local governments in developing the infrastructure necessary to ensure proper detection, evaluation, and coordination in response to foodborne outbreaks. Standard operating procedures for sharing information and data among agencies and with the public on foodborne outbreaks will be developed.

Improve capability to estimate risks associated with foodborne hazards (+\$11 million):

HHS (+\$7 million): FDA will initiate a program of research in quantitative risk assessment (particularly for microbial hazards) that is targeted to address the limitations in risk assessment methodologies and available data related to 1) dose-response relations for the general population and high risk groups (e.g. neonates, elderly, immune-compromised), 2) the impact of production, processing, distribution, marketing, and preparation practices, and 3) the quantification of factors contributing to incidence and prevalence of pathogenic microorganisms in raw ingredients and finished products. FDA will continue to build the activities of the interagency Risk Assessment Consortium at the Joint Institute for Food Safety and Nutrition (JIFSAN) that provides a forum for coordination of federal microbial risk assessment research and serves as a clearinghouse for risk assessment information and expertise.

USDA (+\$4 million): The Agriculture Research Service (ARS), Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES), ERS, FSIS, and the Office of the Chief Economist (OCE) will conduct quantitative risk assessments to identify food safety hazards and controls, make faster and more accurate regulatory decisions, target program resources more effectively, and facilitate the development and evaluation of surveillance plans and risk reduction strategies.

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Expand inspection and compliance efforts, implement new preventive measures with a new emphasis on domestic and imported produce, and facilitate the implementation of HACCP (+\$36 million):

HHS (+\$28 million): FDA will enhance protection of American consumers by seeking legislation that would decrease the risk of importing unsafe food products from countries with food safety systems for exported products that are not on a par with the U.S. system or that refuse to allow entry of U.S. investigators into facilities producing products offered for import. FDA will verify implementation of seafood HACCP and implement HACCP for juices. FDA will provide technical assistance and educational outreach to promote the appropriate application of voluntary good agricultural practices/good manufacturing practices (GAP/GMP) guidance in the domestic fresh produce industry.

USDA (+\$8 million): The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) will provide special onetime assistance to State meat and poultry inspection programs to facilitate implementation of HACCP.

Continue to build the national food safety education campaign (+\$14 million):
USDA (+\$10 million) and HHS (+\$4 million) for the following activities:

Consumer and Food Handler Education—USDA (+\$5 million) and HHS (+\$4 million): Building on the national campaign launched by the public-private Partnership for Food Safety Education in 1997, FSIS, CSREES and FDA will target specific programs to change unsafe behaviors used by home food handlers, cooks and food handlers in retail settings and in congregate feeding sites. CDC, FSIS and FDA will begin development of materials to assist in educating school children about how to prevent foodborne illness. FDA will target vulnerable groups (e.g., those affected by *Vibrio* in raw oysters and pregnant women and *Listeria*) with specific food safety messages. FDA will develop multilingual training programs for food service and retail workers and provide technical assistance to domestic and foreign fresh produce industries to promote appropriate application of good agricultural and manufacturing guidance. FSIS will target vulnerable groups (e.g., senior citizens and people with compromised immune systems) and will launch a campaign to promote thorough cooking of meat and poultry products.

School Food Service Provider Education—USDA (+\$2 million): The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) will develop and operate training workshops to educate local school food service professionals about the latest safe food handling practices specific to their needs and the updated Food Code.

Producer Education—USDA (+\$3 million): FSIS and CSREES will work with industry and academia to educate food animal producers and fruit and vegetable producers on food safety assurance practices, risk management, and risk communication.

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Accelerate food safety research efforts (+\$33 million):
(USDA +\$24 million and HHS +\$9 million)

Research will be conducted to enhance understanding of pathogen growth and control and will focus in the four areas identified in interagency research planning as critical to reducing microbial risk in produce. Improved detection methods, particularly rapid tests, will be developed that identify a broader range of pathogens on food products, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables, throughout the food production, manufacturing, and distribution system. Development of prevention/intervention strategies is another area of focus, with research on development of alternative food production, processing, and handling systems that eliminate or reduce pathogen contamination. Research on identification of conditions under which food products become contaminated during food handling, distribution, and storage will play an integral role in this research. FDA and USDA will conduct research on resistance to traditional preservation techniques and antibiotic resistance. USDA will develop a microbiological baseline for pathogens on fresh fruits and vegetables utilizing existing program infrastructure.